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## Navy ships: big is not beautiful

It is self-evident that the United States must adapt to the times in its defense strategy and weaponry. Hence it is hard to understand why there still remains some dogged, old-fashioned support in Congress for huge nuclear-powered aircraft carriers. The House Armed Services Committee has turned down a request by the Defense Department to transfer \$8 million from other programs to begin design of smaller, conventionally powered carriers.

Defense Secretary Harold Brown builds a strong case for shifting to a high-speed, lightweight, small-ship Navy. For one thing, the supercarriers are expensive, costing up to \$2.3 billion to build while the smaller carriers cost under \$1.3 billion. More importantly, the jumbo ships have become increasingly vulnerable to Soviet ballistic missiles. If there were a surprise attack, they would become virtually "sitting ducks" that could easily be knocked out.

What needs to be borne in mind is that the Soviet Union has greatly expanded its own blue water capability. Today it has more surface ships than the United States. The Soviet Navy is no longer a strictly defensive force but a flexible one that is capable of denying sea-lanes to the West and being used for peacetime missions.

To meet the Russian challenge, the U.S. Navy needs to cover more areas than it has in the past. And, given the limited amount of funds available, it is better to spread them over a greater number of ships.

Ironically, President Carter is in conflict with his friend and former mentor Adm. Hyman Rickover on this issue. The Admiral continues to favor the costly giants for America's front-line defense, whereas the President has bought the small-ship concept — a concept advocated by such naval experts as Adm. Elmo Zumwalt Jr. and Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the CIA.

It is to be hoped the House and Senate will reach a compromise on this issue which will permit designing of the smaller carriers to go ahead. In these times of a budget pinch and a changing Soviet strategy, big is not necessarily beautiful.